

HOLINESS IN THE PAUL TRADITION

FROM THESSALONICA TO ROME

360-DEGREE HOLINESS
CHAMBERLAIN HOLINES LECTURES

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HOLINESS IN PAULINE TRADITION

As we explore holiness in Pauline tradition, we focus primarily on Romans and 1 Thessalonians. This is for a number of reasons. 1 Thessalonians has been among the favourite texts of the holiness movement, owing not only to the strong holiness theme running through the letter but also perhaps because 1 Thessalonians contains the only explicit biblical reference to entire sanctification (5.23).¹

Romans, of course, has long been an important text for Protestant theology. For example, Luther was working on lectures on Romans when justification by faith dawned upon his consciousness; Wesley was listening to a reading of Luther's Preface to the Romans when his heart was 'strangely warmed' while Karl Adam famously observed that Barth's commentary on Romans fell like a bomb on the playground of the theologians² and changed the direction of European theology. Romans is clearly an important text to include.

However, there are additional reasons to explore holiness in 1 Thessalonians and Romans. First, is their respective places in the

¹ Interestingly, most commentators and exegetes of 1 Thessalonians 5.23 who are outside of the holiness tradition seem rather more concerned with Paul's body, soul and spirit language than they are with his prayer that these be sanctified entirely.

² Karl Adam, 'Die Theologie der Krisis,' *Hochland*, XXIII (1925/26), 271.

Pauline corpus and in the New Testament. C K Barrett argues that 1 Thessalonians is probably the earliest extant letter of Paul;³ Earl Richard and Karl Donfried each argue for a mid forties date⁴ though an early fifties date is more common. Such an early date would make 1 Thessalonians especially significant because it would mean that it is the beginning of the Pauline corpus, and thus where the New Testament began. It seems to me instructive that the New Testament begins with a letter that is very much concerned with the question of holiness.

Romans of course stands at the other end of the Pauline corpus, generally thought to be among Paul's latest letters; and we find that it too is much concerned with the question of holiness. From first to last, then, we see holiness as a significant theme in Pauline tradition.

Second, is the distinctiveness of the theology of 1 Thessalonians from that of Romans. David Horrell observes that in 1 Thessalonians what might be considered Paul's central theme of justification by faith rather than by works of the law simply does not appear.⁵ Karl Donfried argues that 1 Thessalonians has been the stepchild of modern Pauline

³ cf. C K Barrett, *On Paul*, (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 80.

⁴ cf. Earl Richard, 'Early Pauline Thought: An Analysis of 1 Thessalonians.' *Pauline Theology Vol 1*. (Ed. Jouette M Bassler). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 40. cf. also Karl Paul Donfried, *Paul Thessalonica & Early Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 19

⁵ cf. David Horrell, *An Introduction to the Story of Paul* (London: Continuum, 2000), 42.

studies⁶ because Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians (in that order) have been the texts viewed as most important for access to Paul's thought, causing 1 Thessalonians to be considered, at best, as of secondary importance or, at worst, Paul's least mature thinking not least because it does not address justification by faith.⁷ Abraham Malherbe reminds us that the Paul we meet in 1 Thessalonians is already a mature thinker.⁸ It is therefore important to hear from both Thessalonians and Romans for the broad sweep of Pauline thought on holiness. Each will be considered in turn.

HOLINESS IN THESSALONIANS

Nearly half of the occurrences of ἁγιασμός and ἁγιάζειν in the Pauline corpus are found in 1 Thessalonians⁹ and Marshall observes that 'The specific concept of holiness is more prominent in 1 Thessalonians than elsewhere in Paul.'¹⁰ Why is there such a focus on holiness in this letter?

⁶ For example, in Tom Holland's *Contours of Pauline Theology*, 1 Thessalonians is not discussed at all and neither holiness nor sanctification is listed in his index of subjects. Perhaps even more strikingly, in James Dunn's *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, which runs to over 750 pages, Paul's views on homosexuality in Romans are discussed but not his views on holiness in 1 Thessalonians; cf. pp741-743.

⁷ cf. Donfried (2002), 69ff.

⁸ cf. Abraham J Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, (London: Doubleday, 2000), 14.

⁹ cf. Donfried (2002), 123.

¹⁰ I H Marshall, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 243.

SITZ IM LEBEN

The answers are to be found in the letter's *sitz im leben*, one shaped by apocalyptic hope of parousia, in tension with experiences of persecution, and death. Without an understanding of this wider context the letter's teaching on holiness is difficult to understand.

APOCALYPTIC HOPE

Donfried argues that from 'beginning to end Paul is an apocalypticist.'¹¹ Beker puts it more elegantly: 'I suggest that Jewish apocalyptic is the substratum and master symbolism of Paul's thought because it constituted the linguistic world of Paul the Pharisee....'¹² N T Wright describes 1 Thess 4 as an apocalyptic passage if ever there was one.¹³

However, Wright understands apocalyptic in a particular way. He argues that apocalyptic as described by Beker suggests an end of, or at least a breaking into, the present evil age. Wright argues persuasively for an alternative view; that God will reveal how, despite appearances to the contrary, God has worked out God's covenant plan.

¹¹ Donfried (2002), 14.

¹² J Christiaan Beker, 'Recasting Pauline Theology: The Coherence-Contingency Scheme as Interpretive Model,' *Pauline Theology Vol 1*, Ed. Jouette M Bassler, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 17.

¹³ cf. N T Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (London: SPCK, 2005), 55.

Apocalyptic in Wright's view anticipates that God will do what God has promised though it may not look quite the way anybody thought it would.¹⁴ Apocalyptic hope in 1 Thessalonians is intimately tied up with *parousia*

PAROUSIA

Parousia seems to have occupied a central place in Paul's mind. What do we understand by parousia? It is of course connected with the coming, appearing, or presence of Christ. Of the 24 times that parousia is mentioned in the NT 14 of these are to be found in Pauline epistles, most prominently in 1 Thessalonians.¹⁵ Hence Collins suggests that the parousia is the central theme in Paul's *homilia*.¹⁶

Murphy-O'Connor issues a cautionary note, suggesting that the parousia focus of Thessalonian correspondence has more to do with the recipients' interest in the subject than Paul's. In particular, he notes that some details of parousia teaching expressed in 2 Thessalonians are never mentioned again in the Pauline corpus.¹⁷

¹⁴ cf. N T Wright (2005), 50ff.

¹⁵ Stanley B Marrow, *Paul, His Letters and His Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 80.

¹⁶ Ronald F Collins, *The Birth of the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1993), 153.

¹⁷ cf. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 128ff, for more on this view.

PERSECUTION, SANCTIFICATION & DEATH

Other significant elements in the Thessalonian *sitz im leben* relate to persecution and death. From the account we find in the letter itself as well as the Lukan view preserved in Acts 17 it would appear that the church at Thessalonica was subjected to persecution.¹⁸ It is also clear that some members of the church had died, though it is by no means clear whether these deaths were linked to their sufferings (2.14). Pabee insightfully notes that there is a link in Jewish midrash between martyrdom and sanctification, pointing out that faithfulness to God in the face of suffering was known as ‘sanctification of the holy Name.’¹⁹

In support of this view, Dunn argues that it is because of the experience of persecution and this link between martyrdom and sanctification that the theme of sanctification is so prominent in 1 Thessalonians.²⁰ If this were indeed the case it might also shed some light on the presence of sanctification as a major theme in 1 Peter, also addressed to a Christian community undergoing suffering.

¹⁸ One must heed the warning of scholars like Mount who argue that the Lukan version of Paul’s Thessalonian mission conflicts with Paul’s version in his letter and is therefore wary of reconstructions based on putting both versions together. cf. Christopher Mount, *Pauline Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 140ff, for more on this view.

¹⁹ cf. J S Pabee, *Persecution & Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 30ff.

²⁰ cf. James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 123.

Riesner is much more interested in the mortality rate among the Thessalonians than their persecution as a reason for the sustained discussion of parousia and sanctification. He argues that grave inscriptions in the Roman Empire indicate that less than half of all people reached the age of 25 and less than 5% reached 50.²¹

He thinks it more than likely, then, that the concern about parousia emerges out of this context in which some of the church would almost certainly have died since Paul's visit, though not necessarily as the result of persecution. Whatever the case, whether owing to persecution, or to mortality, or even to both, questions of parousia and sanctification are foremost in this letter.

HOLINESS & PAROUSIA

As Schnelle observes, 1 Thessalonians is dominated by the expectation of imminent parousia.²² Holiness is its other major theme and in this letter the two issues of holiness and parousia are inextricably interlinked. Williams notes,

²¹ cf. Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 383.

²² Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul – His Life & Theology*, (trans.) M E Boring, (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2005), 181.

The Parousia is both the goal of our Christian life, for only then will God's work of salvation be completed, and an incentive for us to work (God being our helper) towards that goal....²³

This is why the apostles²⁴ constantly speak about holiness in a letter concerned primarily with parousia because the day of the Lord will be darkness and not light if God does not find his people holy when he comes.

JUDGEMENT

There is an element of judgement in this interlinking of holiness and parousia, nuanced by Paul's apocalyptic eschatology. Gammie insightfully reminds us: '...apocalyptic writers eloquently declare that the kingdom of God is resolutely intolerant of simply letting stand any obvious defilement of land and persons.'²⁵ It was inconceivable, then, for the apostles to instruct their converts in the nature of the parousia without also instructing them in the way of holiness it required.

HOLINESS AS RELATIONSHIP

Throughout 1 Thessalonians I contend that holiness is perceived primarily in terms of relationship. C K Barrett points out that in Paul's thought '...sin is primarily a relational word rather than an ethical

²³ David J Williams, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1992), 67.

²⁴ 1 Thessalonians claims to be from Paul, Silas, and Timothy and makes almost exclusive use of 'we' (45 times) rather than 'I' (once). cf. discussion of this issue in Malherbe (2000), 86f.

²⁵ Gammie, 184.

word... sin is defined not in relation to an ethical system but in relation to God.²⁶ This being the case, holiness too must be understood not primarily as an ethical or moral word but as a *relational* word.

Holiness is linked to relationship in 3.12–13, where the apostles portray love as the route to holiness, and in 4.6 where sexual morality is described not only in terms of pleasing God but also in terms of not wronging a brother or sister. Nonetheless, it is in the section 5.12–24 that the ideas of holiness and relationship are most clearly intertwined.

The apostles feel it important to exhort the Thessalonians to maintain good vertical relationship with God, horizontal relationships with each other, and diagonal(?)²⁷ relationships with their leaders. If the Thessalonians expect to be holy at the parousia, their holiness must include this grassroots activity of respect for authority, and it is not a begrudging respect, or a grovelling respect, they are to hold them in the highest regard in love.

²⁶ C K Barrett, *Paul: An Introduction to his Thought* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 61.

²⁷ Diagonal might be a good description of the relationship between leaders and led in the Lord. Since both parties are 'in the Lord' they are on the same level yet somehow the leaders are also 'over them in the Lord' (v12). Diagonal seems to be a good description of this relationship; leaders are over the led but not above them.

James Denney, writing over a century ago, notes correctly that this is not what immediately springs to mind when one thinks of holiness.

He comments,

It is quite possible to think so much about holiness as to put holiness out of our reach: it does not come with concentrating thought upon ourselves at all; it is the child of love.... Do not let us imagine that there is any other holiness than that which is thus created.²⁸

RELATIONSHIP TO EACH OTHER

The apostles were concerned to instruct their converts concerning their relationships with their leaders as well as in regard to their relationships with each other. Thus the Thessalonians are urged to admonish the wayward, encourage the worried, help the weak, be patient with the wearisome and to ensure that no one repays the wicked with evil for evil (5.14–15). Williams observes:

What Paul is getting at is that love (agapé) is unselfish, and its practice develops the unselfishness which is the basis of holiness. He can therefore speak of love as the means to that end.²⁹

Instead of repaying evil for evil they are to seek always to do good to one another and to all (v15). This verse has echoes of the prayer of 3.11-13. There the apostles pray that the Thessalonians would grow in love not only for each other but also for all. Here they are encouraged

²⁸ James Denney, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1892), 129-130.

²⁹ Williams, 67.

to repay evil with good not only to each other but also to all, for the love which leads to the holiness they must have at the parousia is not a love turned in on themselves but a love for all. It is this all-encompassing love which *is* holiness. Ernest Best puts it this way:

Thus love and holiness are not in our context two virtues among other virtues but are umbrella words for the whole of Christian activity. The latter unlike the former contains a negative element whose over emphasis easily leads to a form of Christianity in which personal sinlessness is valued more highly than active love for others. Paul holds the two in tension...³⁰

In passing, it is worth noting Bassler's incisive argument that Paul saw an inherent connection between peace and holiness.³¹ She argues that peace is unpacked in this letter in terms of relationship within and without the community. In her view, for example, taking a wife in holiness and not wronging a brother contribute to peaceful relationships in the community because such action avoids adultery and averts confrontation with God, i.e., it enables eschatological peace.

In addition, the instructions to live quietly, not to grieve without hope for dead loved ones, as well as to respect leaders and to avoid repaying evil for evil, all contribute to peaceful and harmonious relationships.

³⁰ Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1977), 151.

³¹ cf. Jouette Bassler, 'Peace in All Ways: Theology in the Thessalonians Letters,' *Pauline Theology Vol 1*, Ed. Jouette M Bassler, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 82.

She argues further that peace is an important concept for Paul, noting that all of his epistles apart from Philemon end with peace.³² In her view, it is because Paul saw an inherent connection between peace and holiness that he petitions the God of peace rather than the God of holiness to sanctify the Thessalonians entirely in 5.23.

SANCTIFICATION IS THE WILL OF GOD

When it is recognised that holiness in 1 Thessalonians refers not merely to right morals but rather to right relationship, not only to God but also with neighbour, it becomes clear that it is not merely the obviously moral exhortations of 4.1–8 which deal with the question of holiness but rather that the entire paraenetic section of 4.1 to 5.24 is saturated with a call to holiness.

That is because of the apostles' conviction, expressed in 4.3: 'This is the will of God, your sanctification.' John Calvin notes, 'In saying that *this is the will of God* he means that we have been called by God for this purpose' [emphasis his].³³

³² cf. Bassler, 82ff for more on this view.

³³ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, (trans.) Ross Mackenzie, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1961), 358.

‘Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God concerning you’ (5.16–18). This section echoes 4.3: ‘this is the will of God, your sanctification.’ If our sanctification sums up the totality of God’s will for us how are we to understand vv16-18? Bruce explains: ‘There, God’s will is his people’s sanctification, which is all-comprehending in its scope... Here, the sanctifying work of the Spirit finds expression in rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving...’³⁴

Marshall develops this further, arguing that this section

makes it clear that it is God’s purpose and intention that Christians should live a life of joyfulness and thankfulness, expressed in prayer. The point is worth emphasising for sometimes believers suspect that God’s will for them is simply a sanctification (4.3) which is self denying and rather negative.³⁵

GOD WILL DO IT

Because sanctification is the will of God 1 Thessalonians expects that God will do it. Despite the exhortations to holy living earlier in the letter, 1 Thessalonians is clear that it is God who sanctifies. Marshall recognises the tension observing that ‘Sanctification is both the work of God... and also the task of the believer.’³⁶ Nonetheless, 1

³⁴ F F Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 125.

³⁵ I H Marshall *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 156.

³⁶ I H Marshall, ‘Pauline Theology in the Thessalonian Correspondence,’ *Paul & Paulinism*, (Eds.) M D Hooker & S G Wilson, (London: SPCK, 1982), 178.

Thessalonians concludes with a prayer that the God of peace who had called them to holiness (4.3) would indeed sanctify them entirely – body, soul and spirit. This prayer is followed by a declaration of faith: It is he who has called you and it is he who will do it, i.e., accomplish this sanctification in you.

HOLINESS IN THE EVERYDAY

Calvin Roetzel argues that Paul's concern to root holiness in everyday life, is consistent with his Pharisaic background, but reshaped by the Christ event.³⁷ We find holiness in the everyday fleshed out in the latter part of chapter 4. Interestingly, whilst 1 Thessalonians instructs in holiness using prohibitions, e.g. abstain from fornication (4.3), do not wrong a brother or sister (4.6), it primarily speaks of positive things that the Thessalonians should undertake. These include loving each other (4.9), pursuing the quiet life, working with their hands, and winning the respect of outsiders (4.11).

The similarity between Romans 12.9–21 and 1 Thessalonians 5.16–22 should be noted. The apostles seem to be making use of traditional

³⁷ cf. Calvin Roetzel, *Paul, the Man & the Myth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 37ff.

material.³⁸ Why does the section 5.12–22 come here? Considering the parousia focus of v23 why do the apostles not simply conclude the letter with the prayer of 23-24 after the parousia section ending at 5.11? However, vv12-22 make sense if viewed as instructions in holiness which lead naturally into the prayer of 23–24.³⁹

Murphy-O'Connor makes the point that the directives in this section of the letter are generic, in that they set a direction but do not impose specific obligations. In short they simply point the Thessalonians to the fact that they must develop a lifestyle appropriate to their new being in Christ.⁴⁰ If this is indeed the case then the intent is obvious; these everyday practices help develop a lifestyle appropriate to their new being in Christ, a lifestyle of holiness.

Importantly, holiness in Thessalonian perspective avoids the reification of both sin and holiness; sin and holiness cease to be *things* to get rid of and get hold of (respectively) and the proper focus of attention, the Holy One, can thus become the focus of pursuit.

³⁸ cf. E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 111-114

³⁹ cf. Marshall (1983), 145ff for a fuller exposition of this view.

⁴⁰ cf. Murphy-O'Connor, 126.

HOLINESS IN ROMANS

As might be expected, the discussion of holiness in Romans has many similarities with Thessalonians. However, there are a number of additional nuances in Romans. Haacker notes that there was a widespread tradition of associating Rome with righteousness and that in contemporary Roman society Rome represented the best example of justice and righteousness.⁴¹ Haacker argues, therefore, that the focus in Romans upon the themes of justification, righteousness, and sanctification is deliberate not only because they are germane to Paul's presentation of his gospel but also because they speak to the Roman situation.

Perhaps the most significant discussion of holiness in Romans is to be found in chapters 5–8, particularly the discussion in chapter 6 where holiness is described in terms of being dead to sin, enslaved to righteousness, and leading to eternal life. With particular reference to these chapters, then, we shall explore each of these descriptions of holiness in turn.

⁴¹ cf. Klaus Haacker, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 121-2.

DEAD TO SIN

What does it mean to be dead to sin in Romans 6? Cranfield offers 4 possibilities:

- i. Christians have died to sin in God's sight, i.e., forensic sense
- ii. Christians have died to sin in sacramental sense, i.e., baptism
- iii. Christians have died to sin in a moral sense, i.e., they mortify their sins
- iv. Christians die to sin only in death.⁴²

Cranfield argues that Paul uses all four meanings at various points but suggests that in 6.2 it is meanings i. and ii. which are paramount.

Schreiner is of the view that meaning iv. may be rejected immediately and that meaning iii. is too weak. While he finds meaning i. attractive he finds it unpersuasive because in Rom 6 the focus is not the penalty but the power of sin. Hence dying to sin in God's sight is of little consequence for escaping sin's power. He therefore concludes that meaning ii. is closest to Paul's intent;⁴³ we die to sin in our baptism.

⁴² cf. C E B Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 299ff. Schreiner also has a similar view. cf. Thomas R Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 305.

⁴³ cf. Schreiner, 305.

However, this idea needs further unpacking; it is not meant to suggest that baptism confers the power to overcome sin.⁴⁴ Such a view overemphasises baptism when Paul is more interested in what it points to, the historic death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism thus functions as shorthand for conversion to, belief in, and initiation and incorporation into Christ.⁴⁵ Dunn concurs:

it is important to note that baptism is not the subject of the passage. The theme is one of death to sin and life under grace, which is documented by the use of baptismal language....⁴⁶

Using baptismal imagery, then, Paul says that Christians have died to sin. For him this is not mere semantics or preacher's hyperbole but part of the reality of salvation. As Schreiner unpacks it

We died with Christ in baptism in that we were united with him in his once-for-all death.... At baptism (i.e., conversion) the death of Christ becomes ours.... By dying with Christ the power of sin has been definitively broken.⁴⁷

However, if this death to Sin is not mere hyperbole or wishful thinking why then do believers not appear to be dead to sin in common experience? Moreover, is not all such talk of death to sin perfectionism? A number of observations need to be noted.

⁴⁴ As argued by Schweitzer in *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953

⁴⁵ So argues Moo. cf. Douglas J Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 366. cf. also Schreiner, 306, for a similar view.

⁴⁶ James D G Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 308.

⁴⁷ Schreiner, 310. cf. also J A Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Romans*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), 200.

First, Romans 6 does not say that sin has died; rather it is the one baptised into Christ who has died. Sin, here viewed as a power, is therefore still very much around though the one who has died to sin is no longer enthralled by it. Therefore, as Ben Witherington puts it, ‘Sin no longer makes Christians an offer they can’t refuse.’⁴⁸

Second, what we find in Romans 6, then, is not an assertion that sin is impossible for believers but rather an assertion that escape from sin’s power is now possible. We find a similar assertion in 1 Cor 10.13.

Third, there is an additional nuance to the idea of death to sin that must be noted, its eschatological overtones. Note the language of 6.8: if we *have died* with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. What is in view then is a change of lordship, from that of sin to that of Christ, which of course has eschatological significance and shares its inherent now and not yet tension. Sanders notes:

That Paul in thinking of the significance of Christ’s death, was thinking more in terms of a *change of lordship* which guarantees future salvation than in terms of the expiation of past transgression, is readily seen by reviewing the passages concerning the Christian’s *death with Christ* [emphasis his].⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 156.

⁴⁹ Sanders, 466.

It is clear then that 6.2–7 does not say it is impossible for Christians to sin, nor does it even say that they have achieved victory over sin. Rather it says that we are no longer under sin's tyranny because the end has broken into the present. However, because believers live with the now and not yet tension between the inauguration and the consummation of the end of the age, sin is still present, and indeed still a danger, but sin is no longer an irresistible force.⁵⁰

It is this now and not yet tension which enables Paul to say that believers are dead to sin and immediately go on to urge them not to allow sin to reign. It is a tension between objective statement and an exhortation to live out the demands of Christ.

UNION WITH CHRIST

The eschatological nuance of ch 6 is further highlighted when it is understood that death to sin is effected only through union with Christ. The phrase 'in Christ Jesus' occurs for the first time in Romans in ch 6. This is significant because it makes clear that believers, dead to sin, are alive only in Christ. 'Salvation does not make the believer a self-contained individual who has no needs. On the contrary it joins

⁵⁰ cf. Schreiner, 318 for a similar view.

the believer in a spiritual union to Christ...’ Witherington continues, ‘Being in relationship, not being an independent entity, is the goal....’⁵¹ It is this union with Christ which Paul understands as holiness for as Byrne notes, in biblical usage holiness primarily denotes closeness to God in a relational sense.⁵²

ENSLAVED TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans not only speaks of holiness in terms of being dead to sin, it also speaks of being slaves to righteousness. For Paul the freedom from sin which is effected by union with Christ in his death is not a freedom for ourselves but a freedom for God. It is this freedom for God which he describes as being slaves of righteousness. Dunn notes:

The surprising antithesis – freed to be enslaved, freed by being enslaved – is therefore deliberate and drawn not from a current practice but from the theological insight that man exists only ... in a relationship of dependence on a superior power; his vaunted freedom and independence is illusory.⁵³

This enslavement to righteousness is not an unwilling, but willing one, in which we recognise that it is only through this enslavement to God and righteousness that we experience the merits of grace.

⁵¹ Witherington (2004), 162,

⁵² Brendan Byrne SJ, *Romans*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 203.

⁵³ Dunn (1988), 344-5.

Is Paul arguing that holiness is evidence of being a slave of righteousness or that holiness enslaves to righteousness? Schreiner suggests Paul has both possibilities in mind. Holiness is both the outcome and means of enslavement to righteousness.⁵⁴ Byrne argues:

It would undoubtedly be wrong to make too rigid a distinction between the concepts of “righteousness” and “holiness” in Paul. The two overlap in the sense that each implies some measure of both relationship (to God) and moral transformation.⁵⁵

Cranfield describes the interrelation of righteousness and sanctification more sharply:

to imagine that we can receive righteousness in Christ without at the same time laying hold of sanctification is a profane absurdity. The word ἁγιασμός may be taken as the key-word of the section, though it does not occur till v19.⁵⁶

INCLUSION OF GENTILES

This argument of being slaves of righteousness is an important part of the argument of Romans, not least its discussion of the place of Gentiles and Jews in Christ. Ziesler observes that in the Bible holiness often has moral connotations, but argues that behind these is the notion of belonging to God, being fit for him, and sharing in his holiness.⁵⁷ Keck argues that this sanctification, or belonging to God,

⁵⁴ cf. Schreiner, 341.

⁵⁵ Byrne, 204.

⁵⁶ Cranfield, 308.

⁵⁷ John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, (London: SCM Press, 1989), 170.

which Paul envisages, naturally includes Gentile believers, which was part of Jewish eschatological expectation.

The sanctification of Gentiles then becomes part of Paul's argument — not only that the end has begun in Christ, but also that the Gentiles have been included in the people of God, evidenced by their sanctification.⁵⁸ Indeed, as Thielman reminds us: 'ἅγιος ...in the Septuagint is the adjective of choice for describing the distinctiveness of God's people.'⁵⁹ For examples of this cf. Ex 19.6, Deut 7.6, Jer 2.2-3, Is 4.3, Macc 10.39, Wis 28.9. Thus the usage of this term with reference to Gentiles is indicative of Paul's view that they are included among God's people.

LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE

Holiness in Romans is also seen as leading to eternal life (6.22).

Witherington reminds us that Paul does not see eternal life as some sort of *quid pro quo* for holy living in this lifetime. Rather salvation is a matter of grace, from start to finish. Moreover, he argues that sanctification does not merely happen when one obtains eternal life, rather it is understood to lead to eternal life, as iniquity leads to death.

⁵⁸ cf. Leander E Keck, *Romans*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 171 for more on this view.

⁵⁹ Frank Thielman, 'The Story of Israel and the Theology of Romans 5–8,' *Pauline Theology Vol III*, (Eds.) David M Hay & E Elizabeth Johnson, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 189.

Sanctification is thus an intermediate condition between what was true of believers before they were converted and what will be true of believers at the resurrection to eternal life.⁶⁰ Sanctification is therefore rooted in this life, though it is in anticipation of the next.

ROLE OF THE SPIRIT

Holiness in Romans is understood to be related to the Holy Spirit. We find this in the joyous beginning to chap 8: 'The law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death' (8.1). Bruce argues:

The Spirit has come to make effective in them what Christ has done for them, and to enable them to become in daily experience as far as may be in the present conditions of mortality, what they already are 'in Christ Jesus' and what they will be fully in the resurrection life.⁶¹

An interesting phrase in Romans occurs in the greeting where reference is made to the Spirit of holiness, 1.4. Many commentators gloss over this reference, seeing it merely as an unusually phrased allusion to the Holy Spirit. However, I suggest that it may be more than that. In commenting on Romans 1.3-4 Wright points out that

we know from many of Paul's letters that his opening passages are often carefully crafted with an eye to what he wants to say in the rest of the letter. It seems very unlikely that he would place

⁶⁰ cf. Witherington (2004), 174

⁶¹ F F Bruce, *Romans*, (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 132.

in such a prominent position an explicit statement ... he regarded as at best inadequate and at worst misleading.⁶²

How then might the spirit of holiness best be understood, in light of the rest of the letter? Fee argues rightly in my view that the phrase might best be understood as the Spirit who gives holiness, an idea that is explicitly picked up in 15.16 where Paul's Gentile converts are referred to as 'sanctified by the Holy Spirit.'⁶³ On this understanding, holiness is linked with the idea of the fruit of the Spirit, not dissimilar to the argument Paul makes in Galatians 5. Bruce puts it eloquently:

Christian holiness is not a matter of painstaking conformity to the specific precepts of an external law-code; it is rather a question of the Holy Spirit's producing his fruit in one's life, reproducing those graces which were seen in perfection in the life of Christ.⁶⁴

Holiness in Romans then is very much rooted in Paul's understanding of salvation and in terms of freedom from sin, understood primarily as a power rather than specific sins, and enslavement to righteousness which leads to eternal life.

⁶² N T Wright (2005), 44

⁶³ cf. Gordon D Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 483.

⁶⁴ Bruce (1985), 153.

CONCLUSIONS

The eschatological character of holiness is a significant element of the Pauline tradition. It is because the end has broken into the present that there is the possibility of holiness. Moreover, it is because the end is nigh that the demand for holiness is urgent, so that one may found be blameless before the Holy One in judgement.

This eschatological character of holiness has a strong now and not yet tension, which is crucial to any understanding of holiness. Believers are already holy now, because of their baptismal identification with the objective reality of the decisive act of God in Christ, the true High Priest. And yet they are still being made holy and are to be actively in pursuit of holiness, without which none shall see the Lord.

From the Pauline tradition we discover an understanding of holiness rooted in the everyday rather than in the set apart, holiness which is not based primarily upon the strict keeping of rules, but rather based primarily on right relationship to God, though holiness can never be divorced from good moral conduct.

Thus holiness is located at the ‘now’ pole of the eschatological spectrum. Believers are children of God now, a royal priesthood and a holy nation now; believers are dead to sin now and those who were not a people have already become the people of God through the action of Christ.

Yet holiness understood as relationship to God is also securely located at the ‘not yet’ pole of the eschatological spectrum for we have not yet become perfect as our Father is perfect (Matt 5.48), we have not yet entered into God’s rest as has the pioneer of our salvation (Heb 4.11,14), we have not yet been raised to live with Christ (Rom 6) and we have not yet seen with our eyes the living hope of an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven (1 Pet 1.4).

What we have in human experience of holiness, then, is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, glimpses of the future, a deposit of what is to come, and the first fruits of the harvest.